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## St. Joseph's Fr. Tom Hill is celebrating 40 years in priesthood

[Michelle Leonard](#) Rosemount Town Pages  
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In less than a week, the parishioners of St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Rosemount will congratulate their faith leader, Father Tom Hill, on the 40th anniversary of his ordination into the priesthood.

And while will gladly accept the well wishes of the congregation he has led for eight years, Hill views the upcoming anniversary as just another year of fulfilling the role the Lord has placed him in.

Hill is a very humble man who lives a simple life of reverence and prayer, traits instilled in him through his affiliation with The Order of Friars Minor Capuchin, more commonly known as The Capuchin Order.

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Father Tom Hill

Hill is a Capuchin friar who went on to be ordained. The Capuchins stress brotherhood, living, teaching and praying together. They live a life of simplicity and discipline, but enjoy the camaraderie of being surrounded by others in the Order.

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His journey began as a child. When Hill was 8 his mother died of cancer. Going through the experience presented a young boy with a grown-up question — what is life really about? He had attended Catholic school, and at the end of his sophomore year, about the time he had to make decisions as to high school and the future, he thought about his choices. He considered the seminary, and asked his priest for guidance.

“He said to me, ‘You will go to Mount Calvary,’” Hill said. “In those days, you just said, ‘Yes, Father.’”

Mount Calvary turned out to be a boarding school for young men, but it was also the site of the St. Joseph Province of the Capuchin Order. Studying with the Capuchins, Father Hill learned to appreciate the traditions and teachings offered to him. There was another, more appealing part, too — he said he enjoyed the “sense of laughing, camaraderie, and teasing” that came within the walls of the Order.

After completing his high school education, he entered the seminary, and on Oct. 6, 1966, he was ordained at the House of Seminary in Marathon, Wis.

### Coming to Rosemount

He has moved around some in his 40 years, at first teaching and working in a parish in Milwaukee. About a year after his ordination, he was asked to come to the St. Paul area, where several Catholic schools were looking for chaplains to teach classes. He landed at Brady High School. He served in St. Patrick’s and St. Mark’s while teaching, both parishes located on St. Paul’s lower east side.

In the mid-1990s, he knew he enjoyed parish work, and started thinking about where he wanted to go. He looked at California and Oregon, where there were different houses of the Capuchin Order, but his first call was to come to St. Joseph’s.

For a man who maintains a quiet and humble lifestyle, coming to Rosemount was something completely different — the growth of the community had just started and the parish was feeling its growing pains. He came into a parish with two cemeteries, a Catholic school

and plans of one day opening a new building. The fast pace took some getting used to, but he embraced the calling, gradually blending his style of preaching and teaching with the traditions St. Joseph's parishioners were accustomed to.

He was once told, "'The Capuchins serve the church in their own particular ways,' and they do," he said.

Eight years later

Hill came to Rosemount in September, 1997, and has accomplished quite a bit in his time, though he will not readily accept the praise. He prefers to be considered a facilitator, someone who merely brings people together to get projects started — be it a personal spiritual journey or major building construction.

He recalls some of the difficulties associated with the early planning stages for the new St. Joseph's church, which also celebrates its third anniversary next week. There was a natural resistance to let go by some, while others looked expectantly toward the future. Finding a way to bring those two groups together took time, prayer and guidance, but the congregation grew to embrace the project.

One of the important components to that, Hill said, was creating comfort and familiarity in the new building by bringing artifacts from the old. The most visible of these are the four large stained glass windows which were carefully removed, cleaned and placed into the new facility. Also, by looking out a west-facing window in the sanctuary, the steeple of the former church can still be seen.

Someone once described a church as "a tabernacle that houses life, from birth to death," and Hill agrees. "I know of very few places that have that except for a church," he said.

The parish is now preparing for another big step — building a new school on the vacant land adjacent to the church on Biscayne Avenue. On top of that, in the next year or so, St. Joseph's will prepare for its 150th anniversary.

Suffice it to say, Hill has no plans to move on anytime soon. But when the time comes for him to retire, and say good-bye to the hustle and bustle of suburban living, Father Hill plans to go back to the Capuchin Order, to live the simple, peaceful life of a Franciscan friar.

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